

MISCELLANEOUS NOTES

1. PALE HEDGEHOG *PARAECHINUS MICROPUS* IN SOUTHEAST RAJASTHAN

The pale hedgehog *Paraechinus micropus* has long been considered a species inhabiting deserts and arid plains of India. According to Prater (1988), the hedgehog is confined to the dry desert zone of Kutch, Sindh, Punjab and the former NWFP and the neighbouring tracts. Its presence in the wetter, greener parts of southeast Rajasthan was established when some villagers of Thegda village accidentally caught a specimen 5 km from Kota city (25° 10' N, 75° 52' E) on February 14, 2000. The animal was brought to me, photographed, kept to recuperate for two days and later released in the habitat where it was caught. Kota receives more than 60 cm rainfall per annum. Thegda village is situated on the banks of Right Main Canal and is famous for guava (*Psidium guajava*), orchards and vegetable fields. Later, Dr. Himmat Singh and I searched for possible hideouts of hedgehogs and found pale hedgehog holes under jujuba bushes *Zizyphus jujuba*, which were used as diurnal hideouts by the animal. The long-eared *Hemiechinus auritus*

(Kuowa) as well as pale hedgehogs were seen only west of the Aravalli range by Dr. Himmat Singh (2000).

My enquiries revealed that a pale hedgehog was caught in a factory, not very far from Thegda village in 1996. Again in December 2000, some tribals were found selling four pale hedgehogs as pets at Raipura village, about 8 km from Kota city. All these animals were released in the wild. On further investigation during field trips, I was told that this species is found east of Deoli which is 95 km west of Kota and receives an average rainfall of about 40-50 cms. It is now well established that the pale hedgehog has adapted itself to wetter habitats and is found further east than was earlier presumed.

October 8, 2001

RAKESH VYAS
2-P-22, Vigyan Nagar,
Kota 324 005, Rajasthan,
India.

REFERENCES

PRATER, S.H. (1988): The Book of Indian Animals. Bombay Natural History Society and Oxford University Press, Bombay. Pp. 324.

SINGH, H. (2000): Ecology of Small Mammals in Hilly tracts of Rajasthan. Ph.D. Thesis submitted to Jodhpur University, Jodhpur.

2. SIGHTING OF THE SMOOTH OTTER (*LUTRA PERSPICILLATA*) IN NAGAI DISTRICT ALONG THE BAY OF BENGAL COAST, TAMIL NADU STATE

During a survey of migratory birds along the River Uppaner in Sirkali Taluk, Nagai District of Tamil Nadu State, we came across an otter on February 9, 2000 at 1630 hrs. We set out on a boat from Soorakkadu village, near the town of Sirkali and moved downward towards the ocean, near the village of Thirumulaivasal. About 1,200 m from the sea, we saw an otter coming out of the water. We stopped the boat and observed

the otter for about three minutes. After seeing us, the otter turned around and moved on to the nearby *Prosopis juliflora* vegetation. We walked along the river and saw several footprints and remains of the otter's fish food. The habitat has a coconut farm and an abandoned shrimp farm. Interview with locals indicated a small otter population inhabiting the area with no apparent sign of hunting pressure. This is the first recorded

case on the occurrence of this species from this area (Nagai district). Three species of otters namely the Asian small-clawed otter (*Aonyx cinerea*), smooth otter (*Lutra perspicillata*) and Eurasian otter (*Lutra lutra*) occur in India. Although the smooth otter is found throughout India, little is known about its population status and distribution in Tamil Nadu. Otters in general are becoming increasingly rare outside of national parks and wildlife sanctuaries, and are threatened in many areas due to poaching, habitat destruction and reduction in prey biomass (Foster-Turley *et al.* 1990). Otters are at the top of the food chain and they are indicators of habitat quality. When pollutants such as heavy metals and organochlorines like PCBs contaminate the environment, otters are among the first species to disappear (Mason and MacDonald 1986). The sighting of an otter along the coastal area in Nagai district indicates that this species can

survive in an unprotected area if the environment is healthy and if locals do not harm them. Further surveys are vital to estimate the population status of otters outside protected areas in Tamil Nadu State.

We thank Mr. Poo Munian for arranging a boat for the survey, and Mr. G. Natarajan for accompanying us in the field. We also thank their families for hospitality.

August 21, 2001

G. AGORAMOORTHY
S.M. Govindasamy Nayakkar
Memorial Foundation,
4 Thittai Road, Thenpathy 609 111,
Sirkali Taluk, Nagai District,
Tamil Nadu, India.

MINNA J. HSU
Sun Yat-sen University,
P.O. Box 59-157,
Kaohsiung 80424, Taiwan.

REFERENCES

- FOSTER-TURLEY, P.S. MACDONALD & C. MASON (1990): Otters. An Action Plan for their Conservation. International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, Gland, pp. 126.
MASON, C.F. & S.M. MACDONALD (1986): Otters: Ecology and Conservation. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 236.

3. IDENTIFICATION OF DORSAL GUARD HAIRS OF STRIPED HYENA *HYAENA HYAENA* (LINNAEUS, 1758) HYAENIDAE: CARNIVORA: MAMMALIA

(With one plate)

Hyaena hyaena, an efficient nocturnal forest scavenger, is distributed in northern and eastern Africa south to Tanzania, Asia Minor to Arabia, Iran, Transcaucasia, Turkmenia, India and Nepal (Honacki *et al.* 1982), but it has not been recorded from the countries east to the Bay of Bengal (Ellerman and Morrison-Scott 1966).

The hyena is included in Schedule III of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 amended in 1991. The species has declined rapidly due to habitat destruction and persecution by human beings and is thus declared 'Vulnerable' (Tikader 1983).

Koppikar and Sabnis (1976, 1977),

Chakraborty and De (1995), De and Chakraborty (1995), Chakraborty *et al.* (1996, 1999) and De *et al.* (1998) worked on the trichotaxonomy of different Indian carnivores. For identification, very little information is available on skin derivatives as well as hairs of hyena, except for that given by Koppikar and Sabnis (1976).

Samples were collected from each of the following dry preserved specimens present in the National Zoological Collection of the Zoological Survey of India, Kolkata: 2 examples (1 ♂, 1 ♀, Sunder, Balaghat, Chhattisgarh); 2 examples (2 ♂, Zoological Garden, Kolkata).